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SUBJECT: JOINT WORKING GROUP TO ASSESS IRAQI ARMED FORCES

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/REL MNF-I, MNC-I and IZ) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki told the Ambassador June 24 that he is interested in establishing a joint working group to assess the Iraqi Armed Forces (IAF). Maliki, Defense Minister Abdul Qader, and National Security Advisor Dr. Mowaffak al-Rubaie agreed that the current force structure is insufficient, that the number and quality of troops is inadequate, and that the equipment procurement plan needs to be re-prioritized.

¶2. (C/REL MNF-I, MNC-I and IZ) SUMMARY CONT'D: Ambassador and senior Coalition leaders agreed that establishing a joint working group would be useful. LTG Fry stressed the need for all involved to undertake the endeavor with an open mind. LTG Chiarelli highlighted the importance of looking at ways to improve capacity within the existing structure. Both Chiarelli and Fry further emphasized that military might alone will not achieve a secure and stable Iraq. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (C/REL MNF-I, MNC-I and IZ) On June 24, Ambassador hosted a working dinner for Iraqi and Coalition leadership to discuss the concept of establishing a joint working group to assess the IAF. The impetus for the session was PM Maliki's concern that the current force is not capable of securing Iraq. Attending for the GOI were PM Maliki, MinDef Abdul Qader, and NSA Rubaie. Coalition attendees included PolMilCouns, LTG Fry (MNF-I), LTG Chiarelli (MNC-I), MG Fastabend (MNF-I), MG Austin (CENTCOM), and BG Gordon (MNSTC-I).

FORCE STRUCTURE

¶4. (C/REL MNF-I, MNC-I and IZ) Maliki said that the current force structure is incapable of securing Iraq and therefore needs to be modified. Based on discussions with Abdul Qader, Maliki recommended that a mechanized battalion be in each brigade to improve maneuverability and firepower. Maliki also proposed that more divisions are needed in hot-spots where swaths of territory are controlled by militias or insurgents (such as in Basra, Kirkuk, Tikrit, and Mosul). To illustrate the combat power deficiency, Maliki pointed out that he and Abdul Qader had wanted the Army to carry out a strike in Basrah against a specific target, but they decided against it because there were insufficient forces to deal with the strike's aftermath.

¶5. (C/REL MNF-I, MNC-I and IZ) LTG Fry responded that, although it is worth reviewing the force structure, much analysis went into the development of the current structure and any change would require careful consideration. Fry also warned against any modification that would require increased

funding since the GOI is under severe budget constraints. Although it may be easy to change the structure on paper, BG Gordon added, it would take much time to realize any results. For example, Gordon explained, training a self-sufficient mechanized battalion would take at least eight months. MG Austin reminded the group that whatever force is ultimately developed, the Iraqis must be able to sustain it.

More Qualified Soldiers

¶6. (C/REL MNF-I, MNC-I and IZ) Maliki questioned whether the quantity and quality of soldiers could prevail against the current insurgency. LTG Chiarelli agreed that the Army needs an additional 22,000 soldiers to complete the planned ten-division Iraqi Army; Abdul Qader should make recruitment a priority, Chiarelli recommended. Chiarelli also questioned whether more soldiers would be needed after the additional 22,000 are added. The joint working group's time and effort should address manpower shortages that result from systemic issues, Chiarelli stated, such as chronic high levels of absenteeism. On any given day, he pointed out, 25 percent of the nationally-deployed military is on leave because -- without a modern banking system -- soldiers must hand-deliver salaries to their families. In addition, due to poor leadership and a lax absentee policy at the Ministry of Interior, only 50 percent of two divisions of National Police show up for work on any given day.

Equipment

¶7. (C/REL MNF-I, MNC-I and IZ) Maliki and Abdul Qader both emphasized the need for more light-to-medium weaponry that would increase firepower and equipment that would improve mobility. BG Gordon stressed that a substantial amount of equipment had been procured to address these needs but is yet to be delivered, either because it takes time for the manufacturer to build or because the Iraqis cannot meet their payment schedules. BG Gordon listed a number of big procurements that are "in the pipeline," including 2,797 armored HUMVEES and 378 wheeled, armored personnel carriers. Gordon also noted that the 448 armored HUMVEES that were procured with Iraqi national funds were on hold for several months because the MoD could not get its money transferred from the Iraqi Central Bank to the U.S. manufacturer.

¶8. (C/REL MNF-I, MNC-I and IZ) LTG Chiarelli stated that developing strategies to ensure utilization, sustainability, and accountability of equipment is important. Forces must learn to use the equipment they have been issued, he said. For example, Coalition Forces have found that Iraqis manning checkpoints are not wearing their helmets or their armored vests. Chiarelli also pointed out that forces frequently are unable to move because of their inability to refuel their vehicles in a timely manner. If a unit runs out of its allotted monthly fuel, Chiarelli stated, the procurement process can become a 28-day bureaucratic nightmare. This frequently happens with the border police who are at 100 percent capacity but are left largely in static positions because of fuel issues. Chiarelli further mentioned the need to solve the all-too-common problem of ISF equipment falling into unauthorized hands.

INTELLIGENCE

¶9. (C/REL MNF-I, MNC-I and IZ) Rubaie raised the importance of enhancing the capacity within the intelligence community and increasing the number of Special Forces units to carry out precise strikes based on the intelligence. PolMilCouns agreed that improving intelligence is critical and pointed out that the power of communication and the ability to exploit strategic information will do much toward winning this war.

JOINT WORKING GROUP

¶10. (C/REL MNF-I, MNC-I) The dinner closed with all agreeing to establish a joint working group to assess the IAF. Ambassador and Maliki agreed to coordinate with the relevant representatives to ensure that a meeting is set up within the next week or so. Ambassador stressed that it would be important for the working group to have some initial input for Maliki before he leaves for Washington later in July.

¶11. (C/REL MNF-I, MNC-I and IZ) COMMENT: Once again, Maliki has shown that he is willing to take initiative and unafraid of voicing his views, at least to the Coalition. Further, it is not surprising that Maliki has requested a review of the current IAF, since the word around the MoD for weeks has been that, if Abdul Qader became MinDef, Maliki would begin his term by pushing for change in many areas, including the force structure and civil service. Although drastic changes may not be appropriate or in our interests, we do believe that a joint working group could be a good forum to pursue improvements in logistics, management, and sustainability. These areas are in extreme need of attention. Policies and procedures must be developed and implemented to ensure that when the Coalition leaves, the MoD will be able to sustain not only its forces in the field and in the office, but its wealth of equipment spread across the country. END COMMENT. Khalilzad